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FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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FROM : AMEMBASSY, GUATEMALA — DESP. NO. 1018 — 790D05-0838

TO : THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE, WASHINGTON — DATE June 18, 1954

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SUBJECT: Joint Weeka No. 24 for State, Army and Air Departments from SA

DECLASSIFICATION DATE 11/22/74 — OFFICE ARA

PER [redacted] — FADRC FOI CASE NO. 64259 — SUMMARY [illegible]

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The events of the week have shaken Guatemala as she has not been shaken since the assassination of Colonel ARANA in July 1949. The continued hammering by the clandestine anti-Communist radio station on its theme that the end of the present Guatemalan Government is at hand, the parachuting, intentionally or inadvertently, of arms and ammunition into Government hands on the Pacific Coast, and the obvious alarm of the Government, have produced a widespread feeling of imminent crisis. The Government for its part is moving to meet this crisis energetically and often ruthlessly, arresting anti-Communists by the hundreds, murdering several of them, and searching houses in great numbers. On the Pacific Coast bands of peasants, armed with machetes, clubs and old firearms, patrol the highways, stopping and searching all cars, and the authorities are arresting farm owners indiscriminately in certain areas. The Government is utilizing its powers under the suspension of the guarantees of civil liberties (Weeka No. 23, June 11) to prevent the rising of an anti-Communist Fifth Column within the country should the forces of the Guatemalan exile, Colonel Carlos CASTILLO Armas, launch their invasion. The continued Communist insistence that the Government not make a tactical withdrawal of its support from them suggests that other factions within the Government have proposed such a move.

In the absence of local political news in the press, rumors and speculations circulated wildly during the week. The story that a group of Army officers had demanded that President ARBENZ give up his office or his Communist friends was heard on all sides. Reports of arrests and murders by the police inflated the undoubtedly high number of such incidents. The mysterious departure of a Guatemalan Army plane from the local airport on the evening of June 15 gave rise to various stories of the flight of high personages from the country. Nerves obviously were on edge.

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ACTION COPY — DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The action office must return this permanent record copy to DC/R files with an endorsement of action taken.

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Desp. No. 1018
From Guatemala

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(Classification)

Encl. No.
Desp. No.
From

DOMESTIC

F790005-0839

Rumored Resignation of President Arbenz. The story of the supposed resignation of President Arbenz which was broadcast from Mexico on June 14 received little credence locally since it was all too obvious that no change in Government policy had taken place. However, more widely accepted was the story from which the Mexican report obviously sprang that a group of high-ranking Army officers had given President Arbenz an ultimatum either to resign from office or to clean the Communists out of the Government. It appears that what actually happened was that a group of such officers did consult with President Arbenz about the problem of the Communists in the Government, but there is no indication that the officers threatened the President, although there are signs that many of them are not happy about the situation.

Mysterious Flight of Plane from Airport. At about 11:00 p.m. June 15, the President's luxurious automobile, well escorted, drove to the airport which was then declared closed, the radio stations shut down and only a few Government people allowed to see the unloading of the car, its passengers or cargo presumably being placed aboard a Guatemalan Army C-47 which took off shortly thereafter accompanied by two AT-6's which the Guatemalan Army uses as combat planes. The airport was reopened several hours later. Stories have been heard variously that the President, that Mrs. Arbenz, and that the President's Mother departed in the plane, but none of these seems to be true. The one thing that can be said with certainty is that the Government obviously attached great importance to the departure of the plane.

Police Action. In their drive against the opponents of the Government, the police seem to follow no particular pattern but are picking up both persons of prominence in the legal anti-Communist movement and unknowns, even common laborers. The police seem tireless in their searching of houses for arms or documents. Not only have such arrests been frequent but it is evident that a number of those arrested have been murdered by the police. One of the most publicized cases was that of Alfredo ABULARACH, whose body, showing severe bruises and a pistol wound, was found by the police in his sporting goods store on June 19, the day following his arrest. The Guardia Civil reported to the local press that he had shot himself while the police were inspecting his store, but this report was taken as further evidence of the Government's bad taste. Perfecto VILLEGAS was found on a local street on June 11 after having disappeared from sight following his arrest on June 2. The police announced that they are seeking an unidentified automobile which had struck him down and killed him. The Embassy has reliable reports of three unidentified bodies being found in the streets bearing bullet wounds, the general supposition

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being that these were also victims of the police, and rumor places the number of deaths much higher.

Rural Areas. Outside of the city, activities against opponents of the Government were greatly stepped up. On June 13 the Secretary of the police (Guardia Civil) issued a statement to the press on a shooting which had occurred in a little village of El Durazno in the Department of Guatemala. According to this statement, a group of police went to the village to arrest members of a counter-revolutionary group, but 40 men armed with machetes rushed out to meet the party, killing two police and injuring a third. Later the same night the police sent two patrol cars to the village, the occupants of which were again attacked by the villagers, two of the attackers being killed. On the next day, when police arrived to investigate further, the villagers again attacked and three of their number were killed and others arrested. A more reliable report indicates that on the second and third visits, the police met no opposition but proceeded in cold blood to shoot down a considerable number of the villagers.

In the Pacific coastal area, feeling was particularly high, with the Communists organizing the peasants into bands which patrol the highways, stopping all cars and searching them for arms. In the small towns of that region, particularly around Retalhuleu, a large number of people known to be out of sympathy with the Government have been arrested, some being held for a few days in the local jails, and others being sent to Guatemala City. It is understood that feeling against the large farmowners is being particularly aroused, and many of the farmers' families have moved to the City.

At the United Fruit Company headquarters at Tiquisate a large number of peasants on June 17 followed police into the Company grounds and surrounded the office building which the police searched without finding anything of interest. Arrests among the Company's Guatemalan employees are understood to be high and many of those Guatemalan employees in supervisory positions who have not been arrested have gone into hiding so that normal operations in the Division have almost come to a halt. The Embassy has pointed out to theForeign Office the necessity for proper police protection for the area.

Arms Drop. The parachuting of a considerable quantity of arms in the village of Guatalón on June 14 raised excitement on the Pacific coast to fever heights. From one to three truckloads of arms reportedly were picked up by peasants and turned over to the Government. The Ministry of Government, in a release to the press on June 17, stated that sub-machine guns dropped bore no marks but the ammunition for the guns is of the type used by the United States. Some of the rifles were marked with the hammer and sickle or a star, while others were inscribed "Remington

Armory 1917". The police released photographs of 17 sub-machine guns, 57 rifles and ammunition containers which they said were included among the arms recovered by the Government from the drop. The police asserted that the Soviet-marked arms were apparently intended to arm conspirators and "to make the Guatemalan Government appear an instrument of a foreign power". Who dropped these arms and whether the majority of those dropped reached their intended recipients is unknown.

Asylum. On June 12, ten Guatemalans who had obtained asylum in the Salvadoran Embassy left the country with safe conducts and on June 17, 18 more left that haven. It is understood that a considerable number of other Guatemalans are awaiting safe conduct in that Embassy. In times of crisis, the Guatemalan Government usually stations heavy police guards around Latin American Embassies to prevent its opponents from obtaining asylum in them. However, Colonel José Alberto FUNES, the Salvadoran Ambassador, objected very strongly to the surrounding of his Embassy by police, the police were withdrawn and Guatemalans have been able to obtain easy entrance into the Embassy grounds.

Plan for pro-Government Demonstration. The Communists are planning to hold on the evening of June 18 a large demonstration of loyalty to the Government and willingness to defend the country. The Communist front student organization, Frente Universitario Democratico (FUD), has summoned to the meeting not only its own members but also numerous other Communists and Communist-dominated organizations, including the labor and peasant organizations, Confederación General de Trabajadores de Guatemala (CGTG) and Confederación Nacional de Campesinos de Guatemala (CNCG).

Leftist Declarations. Communist and fellow traveling organizations continually proclaim their loyalty to the Government in this crisis. Victor Manuel GUTIERREZ, the Communist Secretary General of the CGTG, sent to all labor and peasant organizations an analysis of the present situation in which he asserted that the present crisis has been provoked by the United Fruit Company and other enemies of Guatemala who find the present democratic and progressive Government of the country intolerable, and declared that the principal tasks of labor were "to express to President Arbenz and the Army the willingness of the workers to defend the national sovereignty and the advances made by the people". He also denied that the workers were seeking to supplant the National Army as the defender of the country, and he stated that the workers wished to put themselves at the service of the Army for that defense. The labor and peasant organizations, CGTG and CNCG, on June 17 published a similar message warning against the designs of the Fruit Company and the reactionaries to create a Fifth Column within the country and calling on them to unite and alert their forces for the national defense. The Communist front

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Alianza Feminina Guatemalteca has called for all women to unite in defense of the country. Communist-dominated youth groups have organized at least four brigades to support the Army in defense of the Government. All of these brigades have requested the Army to provide them with military instruction and presumably arms, but so far the military does not appear to have complied with this request.

Communist Fear of Being Abandoned by the Government. Indicating a fear that the Government might yield to the frequently heard suggestion that it reverse its policy of support of the Communists by making a tactical retreat on this point, the Communist organizations continued to emphasize the theme "Not One Step Backwards". The Communist newspaper Tribuna Popular has in the last two weeks carried several lead articles and editorials denouncing the idea, and the Communist-infiltrated political party PRG published in the Tribuna Popular on June 16 an attack on the schemes "to isolate the Communists" which "the more vacillating and cowardly elements in the democratic parties have begun to circulate in a collection of political formulas for a 'partial change in direction' or 'one step backwards'". Gutiérrez, in the course of some of his statements, has also denounced the fearful divisionists within the labor organizations, presumably referring to the advocates of this shift in tactics.

Bananera Strike. The strike at the United Fruit Company's plantation at Bananera which seemed on the point of settlement last Friday when union and Company representatives signed a new contract, still continues, since the union has not yet held a general assembly to ratify the pact. Company officials believe that the Guatemalan Government wishes the dispute settled but do not know whether the Communists had encouraged the workers to expect so much from the strike that they cannot persuade them now to accept the terms of the contract, or whether the Communists in fact do not wish a settlement at this time and are maneuvering to prolong the strike.

Rains. The heavy rains of recent weeks give promise of a good year for Guatemalan agriculture but are damaging the country's transportation system. A section of the railway to Puerto Barrios on the Atlantic coast was washed out on June 14 and it is not expected that service on it will be restored before June 19. Other lines have been temporary blocked by landslides, and a bridge near Guatemala City on the Pacific line washed out last week-end, carrying a locomotive into the stream and killing its engineer.

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INTERNATIONAL

Local developments were of such urgency that the Guatemalan Government apparently had little time for international affairs during the week and consequently there is nothing to report in this field.

For the Ambassador:

William L. Krieg
Counselor of Embassy

Contributors:

Col. A. E. McCormick, Army Attaché.
Col. V. P. Martin, Air Attaché.

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